# Self-Defense Training to Reduce Violence Against Women & Girls: An Integrative Review

Ashlyn Johnson, DNP, APRN-CNP & Britt Cole, MSN, RN

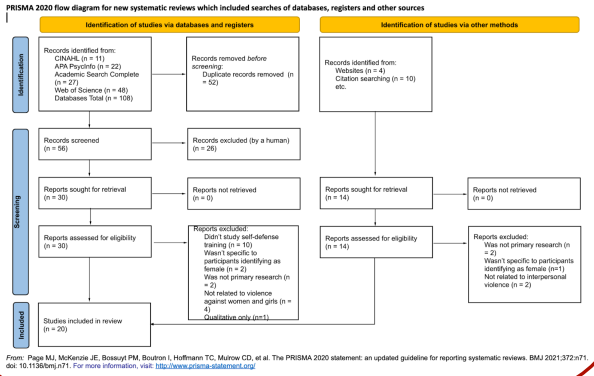
## Introduction

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is a serious threat to individual and public health (WHO, 2021) with as many as 30% of women worldwide having experienced physical or sexual violence (UN Women, 2022). The negative impacts of violence against women are vast, ranging from numerous physical and mental health problems to societal and economic consequences (WHO, 2021; CDC, 2022) with more sexual assault survivors exhibiting distress than for any other violent crime (RAINN, 2022).

## Methods

An integrative review was conducted utilizing Whittemore and Knafl's methodology (2005) to synthesize current evidence on self-defense training, the impact of such training on outcomes related to VAWG, and evaluate the strength of evidence for women's self-defense training interventions. A systematic literature search was guided by the PRISMA statement (Page et al., 2021). This included a comprehensive computer-assisted database search using keywords in CINAHL, APA PsychInfo, Academic Search Complete, and Web of Science, as well as citation searching and website searching. Data were evaluated through quality appraisal of retrieved reports using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT). Data were analyzed according to Whittemore and Knafl's methodology including the constant comparison method and elements of data analysis (2005).

| Inclusion Criteria | Exclusion Criteria |
|---|---|
| ☐ Primary research published in a peer-reviewed journal | ☐ Papers published in a language other than English |
| ☐ Published between 2011 and 2021 | ☐ Review articles and grey literature |
| ☐ Related to self-defense training in the context of VAWG | ☐ Qualitative study design |



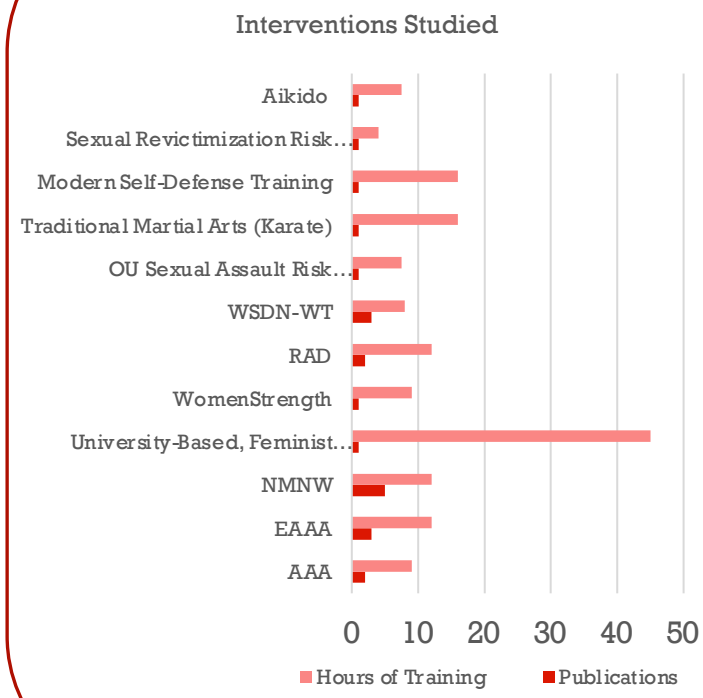

## Results

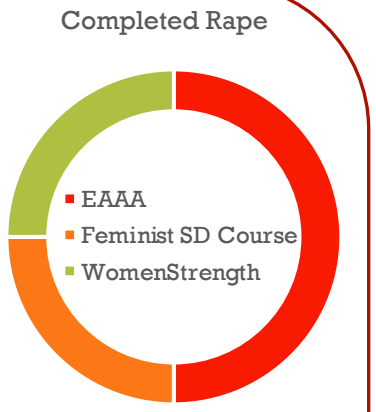
### Included Studies

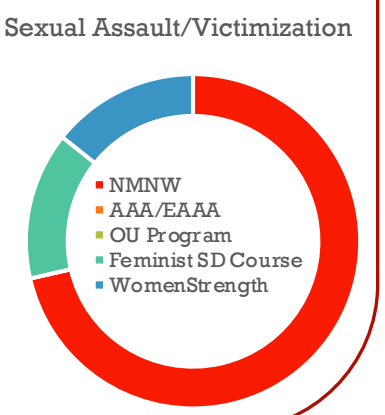
| Author/Date | Setting | Sample | Study design |
|---|---|---|---|
| Ball & Martin (2012) | Midwestern University, United States | Female students ages 18-61 years (n=69) enrolled in a self-defense or stress management course. | Quantitative, non-randomized |
| Baiocchi et al. (2016) | Primary schools in Nairobi, Kenya | Girls ages 10-16 attending 30 primary schools<br>control: n= 2539<br>intervention: n= 3,147 | Quantitative, RCT |
| Decker et al. (2018) | Primary and secondary schools in Malawi | Baseline sample (n=6644)<br>Follow-up (n= 4278)<br>primary school girls mean age 15.28: n=5199<br>secondary school girls mean age 19.55: n=1445 | Quantitative, RCT |
| Edwards et al. (2021) | Indian reservation or city in the same state, United States | Middle and high school girls in grades 6-12<br>control: n= 181 from city<br>intervention: n= 74 from Indian reservation | Quasi-experimental |
| Gidycz et al. (2015) | A medium-sized Midwestern University, United States | Women living in campus residence halls for first-year students<br>n= 650 | Quantitative, RCT |
| Hollander (2014) | Pacific Northwest, United States | Women ages 18-53<br>control: n= 169<br>intervention: n= 117 | Mixed-methods |
| Hollander & Cunningham (2020) | Community-based program, Portland, Oregon | Women ages 18-77 years<br>control: n= 189<br>intervention: n=194 | Quantitative, non-randomized |
| Holmes et al. (2021) | Large, urban university in the Midwest United States | 82 adult women aged 18-66 years<br>49 with a history of interpersonal victimization<br>33 women without a history of interpersonal victimization | Quantitative, non-randomized |
| Jordan & Mossman (2018) | New Zealand | Women who had previous experiences of partner victimization and attended a WSDN-WT course<br>n= 159 pre- and post-surveys<br>n= 36 interviews | Mixed methods |
| Jordan & Mossman (2019) | New Zealand | Women who had previous experiences of partner victimization and attended a WSDN-WT course<br>n= 159 pre- and post-surveys<br>Qualitative data- 36 interviews | Mixed methods |
| Jordan & Mossman (2021) | New Zealand | Women who attended a WSDN-WT course (n=115)<br>migrant and refugee (n=68)<br>rural (n=18)<br>Wahine Maori (n=10)<br>disability- brain injury and hearing impairment (n=19)<br>Qualitative data were collected from 15 participants, including from three focus groups and seven one-on-one interviews | Mixed methods |
| Mouilso et al. (2011) | Large southeastern university and a midsized midwestern university, United States | Women who reported victimization at baseline and four-month follow-up<br>n=147 | Quantitative, RCT |
| Pinciotti & Orcutt (2018) | United States | Women aged 18-75 years enrolled in self-defense training (n=233) | Quantitative descriptive |
| Sarnquist et al. (2014) | 35 secondary schools in Nairobi | Adolescent girls aged 13-20 years old<br>n= 2406 initial<br>(control: 428 / intervention: 1978)<br>n= 1876 completed 10.5-month follow-up (control: 314 / intervention: 1562) | Quantitative non-randomized |
| Senn (2013) | University, High school | Female university students aged 17-32 years<br>control: n=54<br>intervention: n=34<br>Female high school students ages 14-19<br>n=59 (41 of which completed the posttest) | Quantitative, RCT |
| Senn et al. (2015) | Three universities in Canada- one large university in western Canada and two midsized universities in central Canada | First-year female university students, ages 17-24 years 893 initial (control: n=42/intervention: n=451) 850 completed 12-mo follow-up (control: n=420 /intervention: n=430) | Quantitative, RCT |
| Senn et al. (2017) | Three Canadian Universities | First-year female undergraduate students, ages 17-24 years<br>n=877 | Secondary and 2-year outcomes of a quantitative randomized controlled trial |
| Senn at al. (2011) | University in Canada | First-year, undergraduate female students n= 214 (116 completed pre- and post-surveys) | Quantitative, RCT |
| Sinclair et al. (2013) | High schools in Nairobi, Kenya | Baseline:<br>522 Girls ages 14-21 n= 522 (control: n= 120 / intervention: n= 402)<br><br>10-month follow-up: n= 489 | Quantitative non-randomized |
| Weiss et al. (2017) | Midwestern Veterans Affairs Medical Center in US | Females (control: n= 39 / intervention: n= 46)<br>Males (control: n= 56 / intervention: n= 56) | Quantitative, RCT |

## Results

### Key Findings




## Conclusions

Key findings from this integrative review included strong evidence for women's self-defense training to reduce attempted rape, completed rape, and overall victimization, as well as emerging evidence for reduction in PTSD symptoms and psychological distress among other positive outcomes. Synthesis of the current evidence related to women's self-defense training, identification of evidence-based women's self-defense interventions, and evaluation of the strength of evidence for the use of women's self-defense interventions may help multi-disciplinary teams to implement targeted interventions to reduce violence against women. Further research is needed in more diverse groups of women at risk for violence and to identify key characteristics of interventions that demonstrate efficacy.

MIAMI UNIVERSITY